

A-50

The four
Literary
Veterans of
Karnataka
(Jnanapith Awardees)

Karnataka Sahitya Akademi
Bangalore

A-50

The four
Literary
Veterans of
Karnataka



KARNATAKA SAHITYA ACADEMY
BANGALORE - 560 002

THE FOUR LITERARY VETERANS OF KARNATARA (Pen-portraits) by Prof. H. S. K.

Published by the academy on the occasion of organising a 2-day National Seminar and Antharbharathi Poets' Meet in New Delhi.

KARNATAKA SAHITYA ACADEMY

14/3, CANARA FINANCE CORPORATION BUILDING
NRUPATHUNGA ROAD, BANGALORE - 560 002
(KARNATAKA), INDIA

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

The four literary veterans of Karnataka deals with four eminent men of letters who have won the Jnanapith Award and thus brought laurels to Karnataka.

This brochure is published on the occasion of organising the first ever two-day National Seminar on *Contemporary Indian Literature* and a Poets' meet in New Delhi on 14, 15 Feb. 1987, by the Karnataka Sahitya Academy, Bangalore. (The details of the function are given at the end of this brochure.)

The significant contribution of Dr. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, Dr. D.R. Bendre, Dr. Kuvempu and Dr. Shivarama Karanth to Kannada literature as well as the literary tradition they represent is being discussed in the seminar.

This brochure may serve the non-Kannada audience present at the time of seminar as a concise introduction to the above-mentioned Kannada writers.

I thank Prof. H. S. K., a well known News paper columnist and writer who has prepared these brief life sketches in a

very short time and Sri P. S. Chandra shekhar, who has assisted us by providing the Photographs of these literateurs.

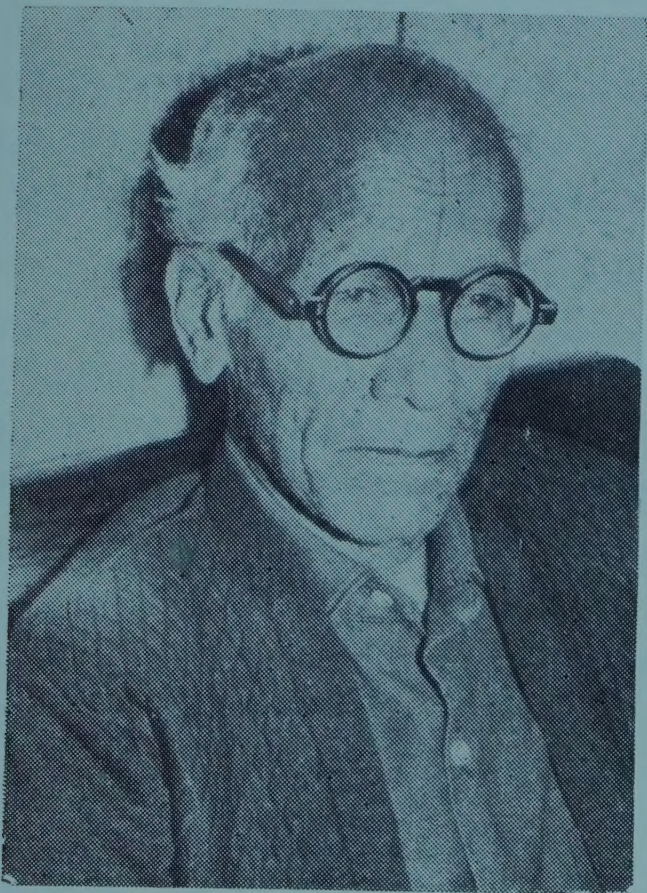
I will be failing in my duty if I forget to acknowledge with gratitude the unceasing support and encouragement extended to me and the members of the academy by Sri Ramakrishna Hegde, Hon. Chief Minister of Karnataka.

I am grateful to the President and all the office-bearers of Delhi Karnataka Sangha for their Co-operation in organising our function in New Delhi.

ಕೆ. ಎಸ್. ನಿಸಾರ್ ಅಹಮದ್

Bangalore
5-2-1987

(K. S. NISAR AHMED)
President
Karnataka Sahitya Academy



Dr. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar

Masti is truly our 'asti'—our precious possession. This was how the people of Karnataka used to describe Dr. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar, one of the greatest writers of modern Kannada. His pen-name is '*Srinivasa*'.

Masti was a legend in his life time. He lived up to the ripe old age of ninety-five. His numerous admirers fondly hoped and believed that he would put in a century. He was like the elder brother of many a young writer. He was not only a great writer, but he was a foster-father of literature. When he was born (June 6, 1891) the great renaissance of Kannada literature was yet to dawn. When he died (June 6, 1986) it had spread in a number of

directions in all its resplendent glory and variety. He was one of the Chief architects of this transformation. He not only remoulded the language to become the vehicle of new thoughts and expressions, but also took it to the very people for whom he wrote.

Born into a highly respectable and cultured high caste family in a village called Masti, situated not far away from Bangalore, Dr. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar imbibed all the hoary traditions of his family which could take pride in belonging to the 'Elevated Household' or 'Melath'. But the family was not quite well-to-do. Masti's forefathers were village accountants. But with the loss of that office the family was left with no source of income.

Masti had his early education in a nearby town. Later he went to Mysore where he continued his studies with great difficulty. But throughout he was a brilliant student and he passed with distinction the Bachelor's degree examination through the Bangalore Central College. He took the Civil Service examination of the erstwhile native State of Mysore and was selected for the officer's post. He was a lover of literature and later took his M. A., in English literature, of the Madras University. Having served the State in many official capacities, he retired as its Excise Commissioner.

Besides being an efficient officer of the Government he took to writing and produced many works of great merit. He became the Vice-President of the Indian P.E.N. in 1964 and later its President (1976). The Karnataka and Mysore Universities awarded him the honorary degree of D.Litt. He got the Central Sahitya Akademi award for a collection of his short stories. His novel *Chikaveera Rajendra* got him the coveted Jnana Pith award. He was the Vice-President of Kannada Sahitya Parishat and presided over one of its Annual Conferences.

Masti was a prolific writer of both prose and poetry. He was a trail-blazer in both. Masti's prose is a model for others to emulate. Masti is considered to be the first great short-story writer of Kannada. He was the father of the Kannada short story. Thirteen volumes of this short stories are published. Some of his stories can be deemed to be world's best. *The Last Days of Sariputra*, *Vasumathi*, *The Rani of Nijagal*, *Mosarina Mangamma*, *Is it Indira or no ?*, *Kalmadia Kona* and *An old story* are brilliant in the treatment of the subject, delineation of characters, philosophical out look, historical hind-sight or humanism. Modern Kannada prose in his hands achieved very great resilience and shone in all its colours. The later short story writers are yet unable to free themselves from his great influence.

Other branches of literature in which he has also achieved equally great success are the narrative poetry, sonnets, plays, novels, drama and criticism. The blank verse form is not new to Kannada literature. But the one and only great writer in this form was Harihara who lived some eight hundred years ago. The blank verse in Masti's hands blossomed into its fullest possibilities, shedding some of its old and worn out rhetoric and acquiring a new lustre. His narrative poems written in blank verse are known for their transparent simplicity and quick movement. *Gowdara Malli*, *Madalinga's Valley*, *Ramanavami* and *Navaratri* are some of his best poems in this form.

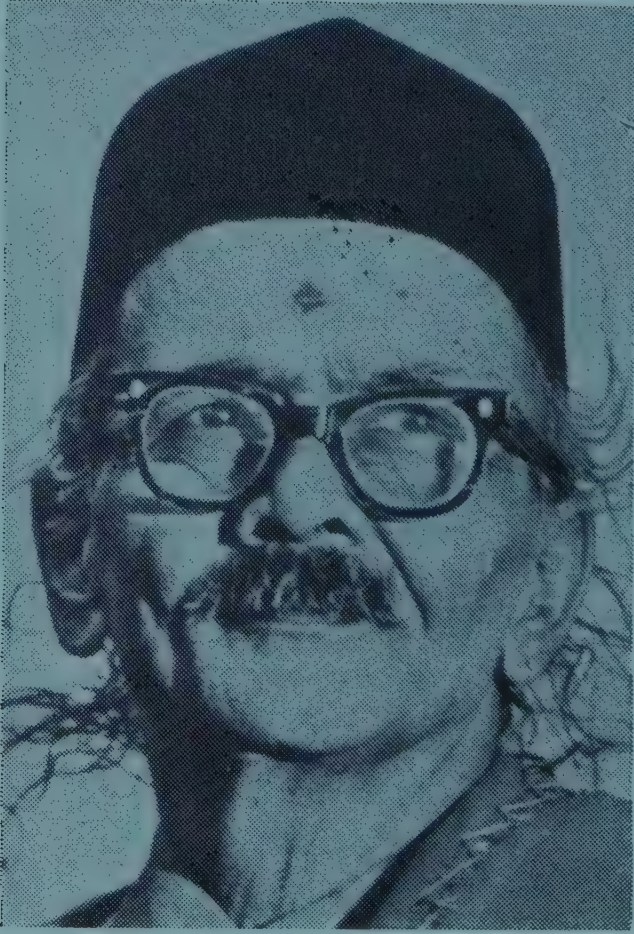
He adopted the Sonnet form to give expression to some of his tenderest and most profound thoughts. Masti's poems are published in twelve collections. His experiments in forging a quiet revolution in form, content, thought and approach but firmly rooted in the traditional soil, became a model to the writers of the next generation.

Masti was a great innovator in drama and novel also. He wrote a number of social, mythological and historical plays,

some of them one-act plays and others running over several acts. His *Kakanakote* became a great success on the stage. His *Subbanna* is a novelette depicting the life of a musician. *Chennabasavanayaka* and *Chikaveera Rajendra* are historical novels. The later won for him the coveted Jnana pith award.

Masti was an equally great critic. He has published five volumes of essays of literary criticism and three volumes of causeries. Besides these, he wrote biographies and edited a literary journal *Jeevana* for quite a number of years. His autobiography, *Bhava*, in three volumes, was published in 1968-69.

Masti was regarded as the elder brother of many an up-and-coming writer. He was a great synthesiser of the occident and the orient. He may not be considered as a modernist, but he was a great liberal and a great humanist.



Dr. D. R. Bendre

One of the three 'gems' among the Kannada poets of the twentieth century is Dr. Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre who, through his many poems of lyrical beauty has captivated the minds of all lovers of poetry. This bard of Dharwar, born in 1896, spanned a rich and colourful life of eighty-five years. His pen-name is *Ambikatanaya Datta*.

Bendre's poems are always an enigma. Coupled with a sense of wide-eyed wonder at the beautiful world around is an often imperceptible halo of mysticism. Like water slipping through our fingers, the variegated meaning and colour of his poetry often eludes us. The Words of T. S. Eliot that great poetry is felt before

it is understood, very much apply to Bendre's poetical works.

Bendre was a brilliant spark of Kannada. But his mother-tongue was Marathi. This in no way lessened his flare for Kannada words. His bilingualism helped him appreciate the good things of both Kannada and Marathi. In addition to a proficiency in these two languages and their literatures, he was well-versed in English, Sanskrit and Prakrit. These treasures helped him not a little in enriching Kannada. He could spin words as he pleased and pun on them.

He was not only a master-poet but was a master in every sense of the term. He could forget himself and the whole world and weave words of fancy whenever he stood up to lecture to an audience or sat down in conversation before his admirers. He was a *garudiga*-a snake charmer enticing everyone with his sonorous voice when he recited his own poems. He was a teacher by profession. But no job could tie him down for along time, for he was like Prometheus unbound.

It is very difficult to describe the life of Bendre. He was a Chitpavan Brahmin by birth. The rich folk songs reverberating around him and the abounding mythological atmosphere forged his poetic mind. His lust for poetry took a definite form when he was a student at Ferguson College in Pune. He says that some unseen force urged him to write poetry. Lakshmisha and Sarvajna were his models. Shelley and Keats inspired him. The works of Kalidasa, Jagannatha Pandita, Jayadeva and Shankaracharya were reverberating in his mind. Tagore's lyrics, Aurobindo's *Future Poetry* and Emerson's Essays wove his poetic future. The *vachanas* of the Shiva Sharanas of Karnataka and the works of A. E. and Maurice Materlink also influenced him.

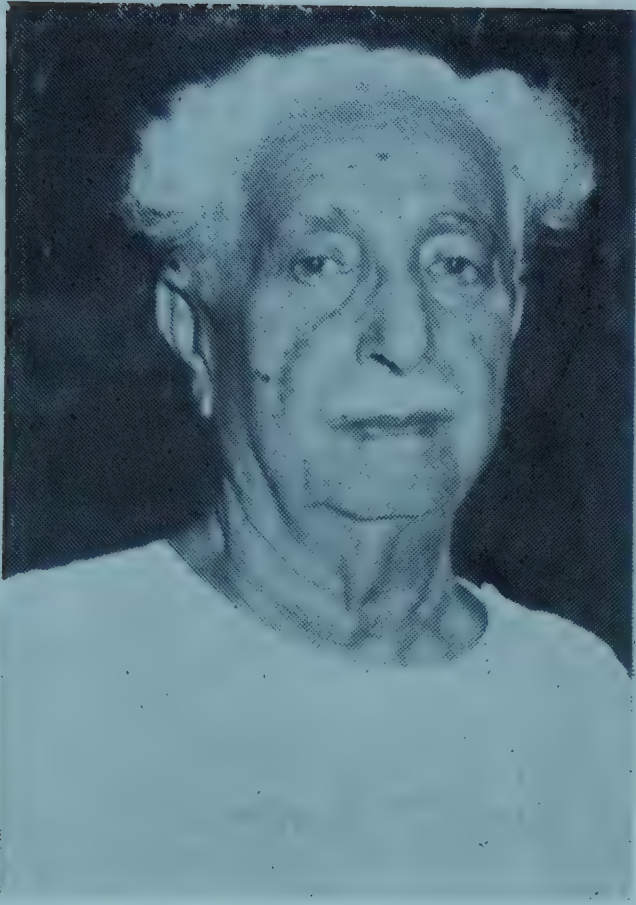
When Bendre was working as a teacher at Dharwar he organised a *Friend's Group* which played a major role in the

literary movement of the day. He himself had evolved into a major poet. His first collection of poems, *Krishnakumari*, had appeared in 1922. The second, *Gari* (Feather) came ten years later. Here we can see a few of the best poems of Bendre. The poet had by then passed through many painful experiences in life. The nation was struggling for freedom. His countrymen were wallowing in utter poverty and ignorance. Bendre, whose heart was elevated to poetic ecstasy and who sang of the coming of dawn also lamented the pitiable state of the thirty-three odd crores of his countrymen. His poem comparing time to the flying bird is a finely woven word-picture. 'Dare you, o man, offer yourself as a sacrifice?' is a challenge thrown to everyone who dreams of building a new land.

Bendre was a poet of the people. We can find the roots of his poetry in our folk songs. He made a number of experiments in poetic expression and attempted to concretise his abstract thought and philosophy. He was deeply immersed in Aurobindo's philosophy. As such his later poems have more of mysticism. But the charm of Words never failed him.

Bendre published 67 books in all. *Gari*, *Sakhigeeta*, *Uyyale*, *Aralu-Maralu* and *Naku Thanti* are some of his poetic collections. The last two collections got for him the Sahitya Akademi and Jnana Pith awards respectively. He also wrote essays and treatises of literary criticism, plays, short stories and philosophical works. He has written books in Marathi also.

Besides the Akademi and Jnana Pith awards he was conferred the honorary D. Litt., degree of the Karnataka and Mysore Universities. He was associated with the Dharwar station of All India Radio for sometime and was a fellow of the Sahitya Akademi.



Dr. Kuvempu

Kuvempu is the pen-name of Dr. K. V. Puttappa. Born in a remote place called Hirikodige in the Western Ghats region of Karnataka, Dr. Kuvempu has grown into a Colossus striding the Kannada literary field. Hirikodige was his mother's place, his village Kuppali being only a few Kilometres away. He had his early education in Tirthahalli and went to Mysore for his secondary and College education. He became an M.A., in Kannada and joined the Mysore University and rose steadily to become its Vice-chancellor. He retired in 1960.

He is best known as a poet. But he has wielded his pen in other areas also. He has written novels, short stories, essays

and plays, and has enlivened every branch of literature. He has written an epic also, based on the story of Rama. It is not just a repetition of the same old story but a recreation. One can see here not only the influences of the earlier writers of Ramayana and other Indian writers but also the Western epic writers—Homer and Virgil, Dante and Milton. Even Shakespeare come to mind as one reads through the pages of *Sri Ramayana Darshanam*. The genius of Kuvempu has blended here the great visions and thoughts of many ages and many sages and a sense of eternal values and modern sensibilities pervade this great work throughout. Written in blank verse, suitably modified to hold the poet's lofty thoughts, this work has a grand style of its own, couched in highly sanskritized and often very simple Kannada. The several characters of the old epic of Valmiki appear here in all their newness and even the darkest ones evoke our sympathy because they are utterly human. *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* is a great epic of the twentieth century and richly deserves the Jnana pith award which it has received.

Kuvempu's poems have a lyrical beauty of their own. To quote Sri L. S. Seshagiri Rao, 'a powerful emotion rises like a fountain' in them. The themes range from love and beauty to heroism and devotion. The poet is a worshipper at the altar of nature. Like Wordsworth he goes into a trance at the sight of a rainbow or a bird or a beautiful landscape. He has written a number of sonnets and his poems on some of the world's great thinkers and prophets are examples to show how even the sonnet form can yield itself to many innovations in the hands of an adept writer. His experiments in metres are really very interesting and he has succeeded in lending an everlasting freshness to his poems. Kuvempu's poems are a class by themselves. *Kolalu*, *Kogile mattu Soviet Russia*, *Chandramanchake Ba chakori* and *Panchajanya* are some of his best known collections of poems.

Kuvempu is a master craftsman in prose also. His two

novels *Kanuru Heggadithi* and *Malegalalli Madumagalu* are both master-pieces. They are as lofty as the peaks of Malnad, of which he is a part. Here nature and man are placed in juxtaposition and even nature plays a vibrant role in the story that unfolds itself like a multipetalled flower. The immediate presence of the all-enveloping life-force, throbbing with robustness, makes these two novels great landmarks in Kannada fiction. They can stand in comparison with the World's great works of fiction. The unison of the micro-and the macro-visions or the universe is concretised in the most effective way in these two novels.

Kuvempu's short stories and essays are other examples of this master stylist. As in poetry, so in prose also Kuvempu's style adopts itself to the particular need. If one can see the tawiness and the superbness of life in his novels, in his stories one can feel the pulse of humanity. *Dhanvanthariya Chikitse* is one of his best stories. The cruelty and heartlessness of the world are depicted here in their minuteness. The poet who, on seeing a long line of snow-white birds flying across the blue sky, exclaims that they are like God's signature, melts like snow on seeing misery, and erupts like a volcano when he sees exploitation. But whatever the mood of the author, every one of his works is an art-piece. His essays are full of humour and they describe the many facets of Malnad life.

Kuvempu has written a number of plays. Some of them are one-act plays, *Beralge Koral* is based on Ekalavya's story, carrying his own message and vision of life. *Raktakshi* is great for its Shakespearean—like treatment. *Smashana Kurukshetra*, *Maharatri*, *Jalagara*, *Chandrasahsa*, *Yamana solu*, *Shudra Tapasvi* are a few of his other plays.

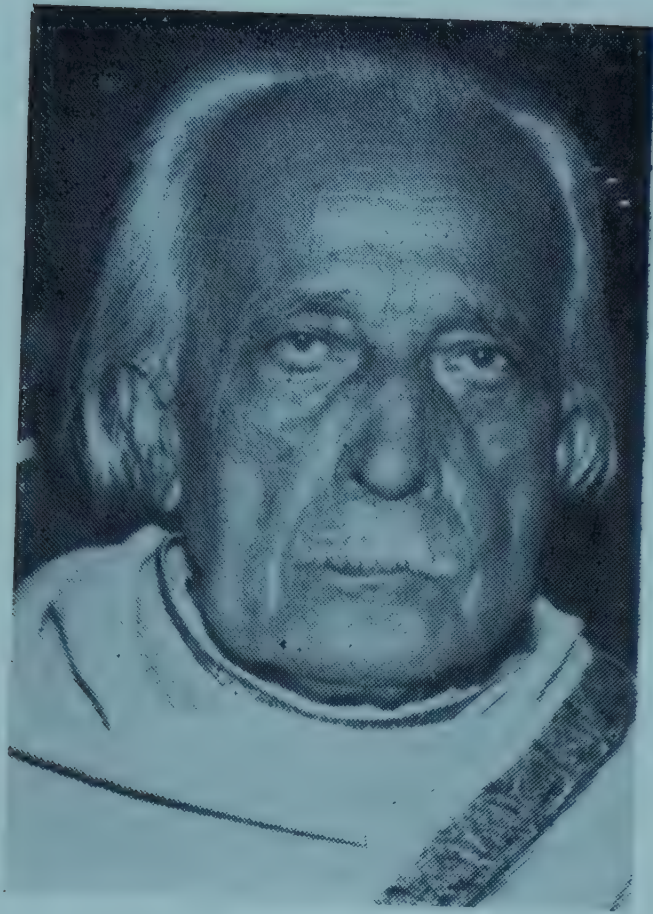
Kuvempu came under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda early in his life. This influence is imperceptably present in all his works. He wants that the world should be redeemed from the shackles of narrow religion and it should

follow the path of *Adhyathma*. The universal man is his ideal. He is devoting the later part of his life for spreading the great message of the universal man.

One can get an insight into the working of the mind of this poet in his critical works and his writings on poetics. He has evolved his own approach to literature. Criticism of vision or *Darshana Vimarshe* is his great contribution in this field. His biographies, his own autobiography and his other writings and speeches present to us an almost full view of his life and philosophy as also his attitude to men and matters.

He is a staunch advocate of the cause of the downtrodden and there is an under-current of revolt against the establishment and the existing social order which is utterly caste-ridden. The *Dalitha* and *Bandaya* poets claim him as their champion. 'What does it matter what the scriptures say? Is there a scripture holier than the human heart?' asks the poet. 'Come out of temples, churches and mosques. Come and root out poverty', is the call of the poet to the youth. 'Come, let us throw out the devil of ignorance and hold aloft the torch of science', is his message.

Kuvempu, who is now eighty-two (b. 29-12-1904), has received many awards. The Sahitya Academy prize was awarded to him in 1955. He has received the hon. D. Litt., from Karnatak, Mysore and Gulbarga Universities. He was the President of the ninth Kannada Literary Conference (1957). The Government of India Conferred the *Padmabhushana* award in 1958. In 1964 he was made *Rashtrakavi* (Karnataka). The Jnana Pith award came in 1968. He is Professor Emeritus of the University of Mysore.



Dr. Shivarama Karanth

Though Dr. Kota Shivarama Karanth is renowned as a novelist par-excellence, he is a unique literary personality with varied interests. Like the other stalwarts of his generation Karanth has also tried his hand in many literary forms. But his interest does not stop there. He is as much interested in science, history, the fine arts, music and dance, folklore, education and politics as in literature. His tireless quest for knowledge knows no bounds. He is a ceaseless experimenter and innovator with an indomitable spirit. It is this quality that has made Shivarama Karanth unique among his contemporaries.

Born in 1902 in Kota, a small village of South Kanara District of Karnataka, he

was attracted early by Mahatma Gandhi. He gave up his studies and entered the struggle for India's freedom. But he was soon disillusioned and settled down at Puttur, which is also in South Kanara. Then followed a life of great experimentation. He produced films, tried his hand in children's education on new lines, made a study of music, dance, sculpture, photography and printing.

Yakshagana which is a flourishing branch of folk art of Karnataka specially attracted him. He organized a number of literary and cultural festivals. The process of self-education also continued. He not only wrote books, but also became a publisher and printer of his own books. Single-handed he produced an encyclopaedia for children, and also an encyclopaedia of Science. Along with such works came his novels, stories, satirical sketches, plays and travelogues. He has also produced a scholarly work on Yakshagana, which got him the Sahitya Akademi Award.

Karanth first came to be known to the literary world as a poet, with his collection of poems, *Rashtrageetha Sudhakara* (1924). In the same year appeared his first novel, *Vichitra Koota*. *Devadootaru* came in 1928, which is full of satire. From then onwards he has been writing a novel a year on an average. *Chomana Dudi* was published in 1933. This has been filmed. It depicts the travails of a landless villager, oppressed by utter poverty and the heartless upper caste people. The work which brought him fame as a great novelist was *Marali Mannige* (1942). *Bettada Jeeva*, *Jaruva Dariyalli*, *Dharmarayana Samsara*, *Karulina Kare*, *Kudiyara Koosu*, *Alida Mele*, *Moojanma* and *Mookajjiya Kanasugalu* are a few of the other novels. The last one won the coveted *Jnana Pith* award. One important characteristic of Karanth's novels is that they are always true to life and are based on his rich and varied experience. Karanth is not a stylist. He has never struggled for the form. His novels unfold themselves naturally and it is this quality that has lent them a lasting lustre.

Karanth's interest in Yakshagana led him to make a number of experiments in that field and reform it. His Yakshranga is the result of such an effort. He has trained students in yakshagana and has taken his troupe to many countries. He has travelled far and wide in India and abroad. His travelogues *Apoorva Paschima* and *Abuvinda Baramakke* are very interesting.

His interest in archaeology and painting and sculpture has led him to conduct research in these fields. He has published a number of volumes on traditional Indian art, which contain a number of reproductions of our old paintings. He is an artist too and has painted several pictures. Photography is another avocation of his.

Karanth has left no field untouched. Apart from a number of light sketches, he has written *Geetha natakas* or song-plays, some of which have been very successful on the stage. *Huchu Manassina Hathu Mukhagalu* is autobiographical and, as the title itself suggests, it is an account of the ten facets of his personality. *Smriti Patalagalu* (Screens of memory), brought out in four volumes contain the reminiscences of his own life and reflections on art, literature and various other areas of his interest.

Karanth is a powerful speaker. His speeches are usually thought-provoking, based on his rich experience and mixed humour and satire. He is always outspoken and never minces matters. His concern for life and literature is really very great.

Apart from the Akademi and Jnana Pith awards, Karanth has received many laurels. He presided over the thirty-seventh Kannada Literary Conference held in Mysore in 1955.

He was awarded the honorary Doctorate by the Karnataka University in 1963. *Padmabhushana* was awarded to him in 1967 but he returned it during the emergency. He got a medal from the Swedish Academy in 1960 for his services to folk dance. ●

DETAILS OF THE PROGRAMME

KARNATAKA SAHITYA ACADEMY, BANGALORE

(with the co-operation of Delhi Karnataka Sangha)

A 2 - day National Seminar on

"CONTEMPORARY INDIAN LITERATURE"

&

"ANTHAR BHARATHI POETS' MEET"

on 14 & 15
Feb. 1987

at Karnataka Bhavan
Chanakya Puri, New Delhi

INAUGURATION

14-2-1987
(Saturday)

First day
11-30 a.m.

Inauguration : **Sri Ramakrishna Hegde**
Hon. Chief Minister of Karnataka

President and
Key note address by : **Dr. V. K. Gokak**
Chairman, Central Sahitya
Academy, New Delhi

*

Nation, State and Contemporary Indian Literature

Session - I

12-30 p.m.

President : Dr. Gopichand Narang
Hindi Literature : Sri Raguvir Sahai
Kannada Literature : Dr. G. S. Amur

Session - II

2-30 p.m.

President : Miss. Qurratulain Hyder
Urdu Literature : Dr. Shamsur Rahman Farooqi
Punjabi Literature : Sri K. S. Duggal

15-2-1987
(Sunday)

Second day

Contemporary Kannada Literature

Session - III

10-00 a.m.

President : Prof. A. N. Moorthy Rao

Tradition as represented by :

Dr. Masti Venkatesha Iyengar : Prof. H. S. Krishnaswamy

Iyengar

Dr. D. R. Bendre : Dr. Shanthinath Desai

Dr. Kuvempu : Dr. Prabhu Shankara

Dr. Shivarama Karanth : Sri H. Y. Sharada Prasad

Modernity

Session - IV

2-30 p.m.

President : Dr. R. C. Hiremath

Navya Literature : Sri H. S. Shivaprakash

Bandaya Literature : Dr. Kale Gowda Nagavara

Dalitha Literature : Dr. Polanki Rama Murthy

Anthar Bharati Poets' Meet

4-30 p.m.

President : Smt. Amrita Pritam

Poets

Dr. V. K. Gokak

Prabhjot Kaur

Balraj Komal

Kumar Pashi

Zubair Razvi

Maqmur Sayeedi

Vishnu Khare

Asad Zaidi

Dr. Ramdarsh Misra

Dr. Narendra Mohan

Tarasingh "Kamil"

Prakash Sathi

S. Balu Rao

Kayyara Kinhanna Rai

Srikrishna Alanahalli

B. T. Lalitha Nayak

Observers

Prof. Indranath Choudhuri

Sri Gurumukh Singh Jeet

Dr. Nagendra

Dr. S. S. Wanjara Bedi

Dr. Motilal Jotwani

Smt. Padma Sachdev

Dr. N. K. Vyas

Smt. Nirmala Jain

Dr. Harumal Sadarangani

Dr. Indira Goswami

Dr. Yashoda Bhat

Sri Girdhar Rathi

Dr. Suresh Awasthi

Sri N. P. Bhat

Sri L. C. Jain

Sri Rajendra Yadav

Sri Ramesh Bakshi

Sri Narendrapal Singh

Sri Narayan 'Shyam'

Dr. Satyavrat Shastri

Sri K. S. Sundram

Sri Jagadish chaturvedi

Sri Ajit Kumar

Sri Valampuri John

Sri Zaheen Naqvi

*



ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಅಕಾಡೆಮಿ
ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು